sovereigns—at least in all except religious matters. As we have seen, after the first few monarchs of the Chou it was a rare *Wang* who was able to become more than a kind of high priest and a source of titles. In the earlier days of the dynasty, the monarchs had much real power and probably were more considerable potentates than those of the Shang. Later they became mere figure-heads, retaining some degree of importance chiefly because of the prestige of their line and their religious functions.

The *Wang* was assisted by a chief minister and by six subordinate ministers in charge of different phases of administration—agriculture, the army, public works, religious rites, the monarch's personal affairs, and punishments. Below these appears to have been an extensive and fairly complicated officialdom of varying ranks. Some of the positions were hereditary. During the many centuries which the dynasty endured, modifications in the system inevitably occurred. As the effective power of the *Wang* declined, this officialdom ceased to have the administrative significance that apparently it once possessed. Accordingly it became more and more stereotyped and regularized. Together with the *Wang,* however, it was considered to have practical religious importance, for its continued functioning was held essential to that cooperation of Heaven, Earth, and man upon which depended the prosperity and welfare of the realm. Religious ceremonies performed by the proper functionaries were supposed to be quite as requisite to the well-being of society as the observance of ethical obligations between man and man.

The realm was divided into two main parts, the royal domains, ruled directly by the *Wang* through his officials, and the fiefs of

the many feudatories. During part of the Chou dynasty, the realm, vassal states and all, appears to have been divided into nine provinces, each with a kind of governor, appointed by the *Wang* from among the local lords. These provinces, however, probably possessed little more than a ceremonial significance and later writers overstressed their actual importance. As has been customary with states organized on the feudal basis, the vassal owed his overlord homage, military service, and tribute. In return he received land. Investiture was marked by solemn ceremonies. Homage was supposed to be performed at periodical intervals, varying with the distance of the fief from the court.